

VZCZCXYZ0002  
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSK #0011/01 0051406  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 051406Z JAN 06  
FM AMEMBASSY MINSK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3579  
INFO RUEHVL/AMEMBASSY VILNIUS 3492  
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 3151  
RUEHKV/AMEMBASSY KIEV 3070  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 3271  
RUEHRA/AMEMBASSY RIGA 1512  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 0820  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE  
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS MINSK 000011

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: Minsk Election Weekly III (December 31 - January 6)

11. This is the third in a weekly series of election-oriented reports, providing brief items of interest related to the March 19, 2006 presidential elections.

-----  
The Campaigns  
-----

12. Expelled BSU Students Not For Kozulin

Independent online news source Charter 97 posted an article on December 30 criticizing opposition presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin. According to the article, Kozulin's supporters are having difficulties collecting signatures from former Belarusian State University (BSU) students who were expelled for their political activities while Kozulin was BSU rector. Zubr's press secretary Aleksandr Atroshchankov claimed Kozulin's initiative group visited his parents' apartment and accused his mother of being anti-democratic after she refused to sign the candidate's petition.

13. No Complaints

On January 3, secretary of Belarus' Central Election Commission (CEC) Nikolai Lozovik claimed that no candidates had submitted complaints about the signature collection process during the New Year holiday weekend. Lozovik told reporters that this was because the candidates abstained from collecting signatures during the holidays as to not disturb the people's celebrations.

14. Signature Collection Successful

Ten plus presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich on January 3 expressed his satisfaction with the start of his signature collection campaign. Several of the gatherers collected 70-80 signatures after their first three days, which shows the "success" of their door-to-door and street campaign. However, campaign leader Sergei Kalyakin noted that not all regions had a good start due to poor coordination between signature gatherers. Kalyakin also informed reporters that during the New Year, a man dressed as a homeless man was soliciting signatures in the name of Milinkevich while being filmed by the state media. Kalyakin called the act the GOB's attempt to discredit Milinkevich and plans to ask the Minsk prosecutor to open an investigation into the incident.

15. Gaidukevich and Voitovich Collect 20,000 Signatures

On January 4, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party and MP Sergei Gaidukevich announced that he had gathered 20,000 signatures for his nomination as a presidential candidate without GOB interference. Gaidukevich attributed his success to the popularity he received from his 2001 run for president and his campaign's human and organizational resources. Former MP Aleksander Voitovich announced on Radio Liberty that he had gathered 15,000-18,000 signatures.

-----  
Election Commissions  
-----

#### 16. The Makeup of Election Commissions

On December 30, Lozovik announced that political party representatives accounted for 2.6 percent of the members of territorial election commissions. The CEC formed 165 territorial election commissions consisting of 2,124 members; roughly 13 people per commission. Six out of 17 political parties have members in the commissions. These parties include the Communist Party of Belarus, the Liberal Democratic Party, the Social Sports Party, the Republican Party of Labor and Justice, the Belarusian Popular Front, and the Agrarian Party. According to Lozovik, 20 percent of the commissions' members represent NGOs and were nominated by the pro-government Belarusian National Youth Union, trade unions, and women's associations. All of these groups, except the BPF, are pro-Lukashenko. Forty-five percent of the commissions' members were nominated via the collection of signatures and 23 percent by workers' collectives. Roughly ten percent of the members are local government or city council officials, 30 percent are employed in the manufacturing, transport/trade, and construction sectors, 22.7 percent - civil servants, 12 percent - educators, 7 percent - farmers, and 1.5 percent - law enforcement officers.

#### 17. Brest Election Commissions

Aleksandr Koleda, chairman of the Brest regional election commission, announced on December 30 that the CEC formed 22 territorial election commissions in the Brest region with 284 members. Ten members are representatives from the Communist Party of Belarus, one from the Liberal Democratic Party, 17 from the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, 15 from the Belarusian National Youth Union, four from veterans' associations and two from the Belarusian Women's Union. All of these groups are pro-Lukashenko. Koleda claimed that the main qualifying criterion for becoming a member of the election commissions was previous participation in election campaigns, which 90 percent of the members met. Twenty-eight commissions were formed in the Gomel region, 29 in the Vitebsk region, 21 in the Grodno region, 27 in the Minsk region, 28 in the Mogilyov region, and 10 in the city of Minsk.

#### 18. Opposition Opposes CEC Commission Results

Leader of the Belarusian Party of Communists and chair of 10+ candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich's campaign Sergei Kalyakin accused the authorities of trying to conduct a nontransparent and unfair presidential election. According to Kalyakin, only one out of the 2,124 territorial commission members represented a pro-democratic party, the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF). Kalyakin's party allegedly nominated 70 people and the United Civic Party (UCP) nominated 38, but none were selected. According to UCP leader Anatoly Lebedko, the commissions are proof that the GOB does not plan to hold free elections. Head of the BPF legal department, Vladimir Labkovich, called the incident a recurrence of the 2001 presidential race and the 2004 parliamentary elections.

#### 19. Only Election Commissions and Trade Unions Use Donations

On January 3, Lukashenko signed a decree allowing trade unions and electoral commissions to use donated funds. In December, the President signed amendments to Decree 300 that granted institutions and private entrepreneurs permission to give funds, property, and ownership rights to trade unions and their

branches and election commissions. Trade unions and NGOs, except political parties, have the right to give their members welfare benefits in the form of money and property, as long as its value does not exceed USD 135. Trade unions can use gratuitous aid for health and recreational activities.

-----  
Harassment  
-----

¶10. A Six-Hour Detainment

Beloozyorsk police on December 29 detained Vladimir Kozeko, regional head of Milinkevich's campaign team, in the Ivanovo district for six hours. Kozeko arrived in Beloozyorsk to receive CEC-issued IDs for members of Milinkevich's team who would be collecting ballot-access signatures. As Kozeko was leaving town, police officers stopped him, ransacked his car, and seized 800 copies of the independent newspaper Narodnaya Volya. After spending six hours at the local police station, Kozeko was released, but the newspapers were not returned. Yury Gubarevich, head of Milinkevich's Brest campaign team, linked Kozeko's detention to President Lukashenko's December 30 visit to the city.

¶11. 2005 A "Tough" Year

Youth activist Boris Goretsky on December 30 commented that 2005 was a "tough and active" year for Belarus' opposition youth movements. According to Goretsky, the police and secret service watched socially and politically active youths more closely and many were jailed and/or expelled from school. Young opposition activists successfully staged several protests despite the oppression and the arrests of prominent figures, such as Malady Front leader Pavel Severinets. Goretsky stated that the youth were actively involved in the pro-democratic effort to select and promote a challenger to Lukashenko in March.

¶12. Social Unrest Possible

Goretsky on January 3 predicted that the GOB's oppressive policies might cause social unrest in 2006. The amendments to the Criminal Code, the increased control of the internet, the closure of independent media, and the persecution of activists could lead to tensions ahead of the March presidential elections. Goretsky opined that many youth activists were ready to defend their rights and vote against Lukashenko. According to Goretsky, more people were joining youth groups and several new chapters have appeared in small towns. The activist claimed that falsified elections could result in unpredictable consequences.

-----  
Miscellaneous  
-----

¶13. Use Belarusian Please!

On January 2, leader of the Francisak Skaryna Belarusian Language Society (BLS) Oleg Trusov urged all presidential candidates to use the Belarusian language in their campaigns. According to Trusov, the BLS would speak out against any attempts to reduce the use of Belarusian in favor of Russian.

¶14. No Coup d'Etat Within GOB

During a January 4 interview, Voitovich commented that he did not believe an active opposition block existed among the nomenclature. He claimed that he has friends within the GOB who would like to see a change of government, but a coup d'etat was impossible. According to Voitovich, this was due to lack of strength within the country to oppose and change the government and that no opposition leader was strong enough to lead the country. The nomenclature knows this, and therefore, prefers to provide for their families rather than lose their jobs.

-----  
Quotes of the Week  
-----

¶15. Head of the BPF's legal department Vladimir Labkovich's response to the results of the territorial commissions and the lack of opposition representation:

"In these conditions it is impossible to monitor the voting process, it would be [more] logical for the authorities to immediately declare Lukashenko the winner rather than conduct the election at all."

PHLIPOT